



Frequently Asked Questions: Canadian Yearly Meeting's Positions on Israel/Palestine

1. What do Canadian Quakers want to see happen in Palestine/Israel?

We recognize that there has been violence by agents of the Israeli government and by militant individuals and groups of Palestinians and Israelis for far too long. We believe that a just peace is possible.

We call on all people not to put their faith in tanks, bombs, or military aggression, which we know, through a wealth of evidence, will never ensure the security or well-being of any society until there is a positive peace, grounded in justice and equality for all under the rule of law.

We are encouraged by all Israelis and Palestinians who engage constructively and nonviolently toward peace. Find our full position at <http://quakerservice.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/CYM-Policy-Statement-on-Israel-Palestine.pdf>

2. What do Canadian Quakers support with respect to boycott?

We encourage Canadian Friends, individually and corporately, to boycott products of illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including those wrongly labelled as "made in Israel."

We call upon the Canadian government to require that products made in the illegal settlements be accurately labelled as such.

We did not find unity to support a full boycott of Israel, just of products of illegal settlements. <http://quakerservice.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/2014-Addendum-to-CYM-minute-78-support-for-boycott-of-settlement-products.pdf>

3. Why do Canadian Quakers support a boycott of products of illegal settlements?

The Government of Canada supports UN resolutions which state that the settlements are illegal (under the Fourth Geneva Convention). Canada's policy says, "The settlements also constitute a serious obstacle to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace." We agree.

Yet the Israeli government continues to plan for and construct new settlement units. While in direct contravention of international law, the Israeli government receives apparent impunity as many within the international community, including Canada, support settlement economies. We consider these illegal settlements immoral and a grave injustice and exacerbating factor in tensions in Israel/Palestine. We cannot in good conscience buy products from, or invest in companies operating in, illegal settlements.

4. Why did Canadian Quakers decide to take up this cause?

Quakers from Ramallah in the Israeli occupied West Bank asked Quakers around the world, including in Canada, to consider a boycott as led. We carefully considered multiple voices and perspectives from Palestine/Israel and after much discernment found unity to support a boycott of the products of illegal settlements.

5. Isn't a boycott anti-Semitic? Are Quakers anti-Semitic?

Anti-Semitism is a very real problem in the world and we unequivocally condemn it every bit as much as we condemn other forms of prejudice and hate.

Labelling the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement anti-Semitic is both incorrect and unfounded.

The international BDS movement, coordinated by Palestinian civil society, is not calling for a boycott of Israel due to hatred of Jews. BDS is a pragmatic and nonviolent tactic which we hope will hasten change in an unbearable and protracted situation.

BDS is not an attack on Israeli citizens but an on-going critique of the worst practices of the Israeli government. One of the founding principles of democracy is the right to dissent and debate, and BDS can be seen through such a lens – an active and nonviolent form of dissent from illegal practises.

BDS is not an end, but merely a means. Once specific issues have been resolved, the boycott will end.

The BDS movement is supported by many Jewish individuals and groups. These include Independent Jewish Voices (in Canada), Jewish Voice for Peace (in the US), Boycott from Within (in Israel), the European Jewish Network for a Just Peace (with member agencies in various European countries), and the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network.

We've expressed concerns with the Government of Canada's labelling BDS "anti-Semitic" in an open letter you can read at <http://quakerservice.ca/news/cfsc-expresses-concerns-with-canada-israel-mou/>

6. But you don't call for a boycott of other countries with poor human rights records - aren't you singling out Israel?

Canadian Quakers were asked by Palestinian Quakers to consider a boycott. Further, calls for international involvement in BDS were initiated by Palestinian civil society. This is something which civil society of other countries with human rights problems have not done in the same way since the anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa, one of the various past boycott movements which Quakers supported. The present circumstances made it our moral duty to consider becoming involved.

We equally and impartially support the human rights of all, everywhere in the world. But circumstances have not called us to actively participate in campaigns for the human rights of all in every country - nor would we have the resources to do so!

We have many ethical investment screens on our money. For example, Canadian Friends Service Committee is 100% fossil fuel industry free as defined by 350.org. Yet it would be preposterous to suggest that we divested from fossil fuels due to a hatred of people working in the fossil fuel industry. Rather, we did so from a positive desire for a more healthy and sustainable earth, recognizing that each of us has a moral responsibility to do our best to realize this collective vision.

7. Why do you think BDS will work?

The power imbalance between the State of Israel and the Palestinian people cannot be overstated. Therefore creative nonviolent tactics are required.

We hope that BDS, by nonviolently engaging at the grassroots, will, in spite of this unequal power dynamic and the incredibly superior force and funding available to the Government of Israel, continue to draw attention to the shocking and painful realities on the ground in Israel/Palestine.

We hope BDS will continue to bring pressure on the Government of Israel to honestly examine and improve its practices.

We believe that ultimately, this is part of a larger process towards a just peace, and that once a shift takes place and the Israeli government's treatment of Palestinians improves, this will benefit all Israelis and all Palestinians.

Find out more at <http://quakerservice.ca/our-work/peace/israel-palestine/> or contact Matthew Legge at matt@quakerservice.ca or 416-920-5213.